

Sunday School

CLOSE OF PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY.

Acts 21:1-17. Lesson for September 12, 1909.

GOLDEN TEXT—"The will of the Lord be done."—Acts 21:14.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Acts 21:1-17. Th.—Mark 8:31-38.
T.—Acts 6:1-7. F.—Luke 6:17-23.
W.—Acts 11:22-30. S.—Luke 18:28-34.
S.—Phil. 1:12-21.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 72. What is forbidden in the seventh commandment?

A. The seventh commandment forbiddeth all unchaste thoughts, words and actions.

TOPICAL OUTLINE.

Paul sails for Jerusalem.

Incidents from Miletus to Tyre, vss. 1-5.

From Tyre to Caesarea, vss. 6-14.

From Caesarea to Jerusalem, vss. 15-17.

LESSON COMMENTS.

Introductory.—Paul had just completed his solemn charge to the Ephesian elders and prayed with them all. They wept as they parted with their beloved teacher and embraced and kissed him. Paul's final farewell produced the greatest grief, and reminds us of the sorrow of the disciples when Jesus told them that He was going to leave them. The elders then went with Paul to the ship. How particular and touching is this inspired diary of Luke! "Nothing can be more touching than these three concluding verses, leaving an indelible impression of rare ministerial fidelity and affection on the apostle's part, and of warm admiration and attachment on the part of these Ephesian elders. Would to God that such scenes were more frequent in the church."

Comment.—Having parted from the Ephesian elders at Miletus, Paul and his companions embarked for Tyre, a noted and ancient city on the western shore of Phœnicia. On a direct route, they touched at Coos, Rhodes and Patara. Coos and Rhodes were islands in the Aegean sea; the former being "famous of old for wine, silk, cotton, the worship of Esculapius, and the residence of Hippocrates"; and the latter "for its colossus or gigantic statue of Apollo." Patara was a town in Lycia, one of the provinces of Asia Minor. At this point, they took another ship and set sail for Tyre, in Syria; having left the large island of Cyprus, through which Paul had traveled during his first missionary journey, to the left. The island was north of them. Tyre was about two days from Patara. The ship was unloaded of its cargo at Tyre, the great commercial city of the east and west. Paul and his company remained a week with Christians in the city; who, knowing by the inspiration of the divine Spirit, that Paul would be in great danger in the holy city, endeavored to persuade him not to proceed on his way. But he did not yield to them. No divine command was given him; and after seven days in Tyre, he and all those with him, went outside the city and had a prayermeeting on the shore. Paul's whole life was suffused with the spirit of prayer.

The next nine verses record several thrilling events. The Christians of Tyre, together with their little ones, accompanied the apostle some distance from the city, and after Paul had embarked for Ptolemais on his way to Caesarea, they returned to their homes in Tyre. Historians inform us that Ptolemais is one of the oldest and most renowned cities in the world; that it is the Accho (Judges 1:31) of the Old Testament; that its European name is Acre, and that it is noted in history for its sieges during the Crusades, and the French Revolution, as well as by the English at a later day. It is near Mount Carmel and is an excellent harbor. Luke says that they remained in that town with the brethren only one day; and they afterwards went to Caesarea by land to the home of the evangelist Philip; who had four unmarried daughters that prophesied. Philip's name is immortal. He

was a good and useful man. He was a deacon and was honest, and full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom (Acts 6:3, 5). He was also a missionary, whose ministry had been greatly honored by God in leading the Ethiopian eunuch to become a Christian (Acts 8:26-38), and in bringing great joy to the city of Samaria by preaching Christ (Acts 8:5-8). He performed many miracles and preached the gospel in all the cities from Gaza to Caesarea. Doubtless this was the first time Paul had seen him in twenty-five years. It is probable that they once knew each other, "being both Hellenists and in Jerusalem together." Acts 6:5. The virgins referred to were not authoritative public teachers; but were endowed with the special gift of foretelling future events, such as Paul's coming trouble in Jerusalem. Paul remained at Caesarea for some time, as he did not contemplate arriving at Jerusalem until Pentecost; and during his stay there, Agabus, a prophet from Judea, visited him; and taking Paul's girdle, bound his own hands and feet with it; and by the Holy Spirit, foretold the fact that the Jews in Jerusalem would confine him and deliver him to the Roman authorities. (Acts 21:33.) The prophecy of Agabus made a deep impression upon all those who heard it, and they besought the apostle with tears not to go to Jerusalem and endanger his valuable life. But while his heart was broken when he saw their tears, he said that he was not only willing to go to Jerusalem, but die there for Jesus' sake. Prophecies, prayers and tears did not affect his unreserved determination to carry out his purpose and his friends submitted to God's will as expressed in this event of His providence.

The last three verses narrate the facts that the company took their baggage and went to Jerusalem and were gladly received by the Christian people. Some of the disciples of Caesarea went with Paul to the house of an old member of the church, Mnason of Cyprus, who was living in Jerusalem, and who was to entertain the apostle and his friends. Paul thus completed his third and last missionary journey. He afterwards went to Rome, but he went as a prisoner. (Acts 19:21.) He died as a martyr under Nero.

Doctrinal and Practical.—1. The book of the Acts of the Apostles is the only book of church history in the New Testament, and it records the wonderful progress of the Christian religion in primitive times. Paul found congenial spirits at Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea and Jerusalem, who entertained him. Hospitality is an evidence of piety. (Romans 12:13.) The jailer and Lydia did not treat Paul kindly until they were converted. (Acts 16:14, 15 and 33, 34.) A change of heart changes our feelings towards Jesus and His people.

2. The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit have ceased. The gifts of prophecy, working miracles, healing, tongues, inspiration are no longer needed. (1 Corinthians 13:8.) Christianity is no longer in its infancy and the reason of these gifts no longer exists. The ordinary gifts of the Spirit: regeneration, conviction, conversion and sanctification are permanent and universal with believers.

3. Women should never be authorized by our Presbyteries to preach publicly the gospel to mixed audiences. (1 Corinthians 14:34, 35, and 1 Timothy 2:2.) There are a great many other spheres of usefulness they may occupy in private, such as the home, Sabbath-school and educational and missionary work. They have adorned these spheres with queenly grace, consecration and modesty, and God has blessed their efforts. "It is therefore only the public exercise of the gift that is prohibited."—Hodge.

4. The office of deacon is divine. Philip was one of the seven godly men who was chosen to manage the temporal affairs of the Church. It is impossible to improve the divine order. The temporal affairs of the Church today should be committed to their hands under the supervision of the session. Few ministers can give themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word," (Acts 6:41 and 1 Timothy 4:15) and manage the numerous, secular affairs incident to Christian work. Philip and Paul, however, sometimes discharged both kinds of duties.

5. We need a better type of piety at the present time among our ministers, officers and members; the martyr spirit, resignation, brotherly love and aggressiveness. E. P. Davis.